



Apollo 13: A Successful Failure

The movie “Apollo 13” is used to demonstrate some of the concepts discussed in the modules on leadership. The movie is 2 hours and 20 minutes long. Plan on showing the movie, pausing at each of the eight discussion scenes, and discussing the questions in the guide.

References

“Apollo 13,” Universal Pictures

“Lost Moon,” by Jim Lovell and Jeffrey Kluger

Role Call

Tom Hanks Jim Lovell, mission commander

Ed Harris Gene Kranz, flight director

Bill Paxton Fred Haise, lunar module pilot

Kevin Bacon Jack Swigert, command module pilot

Gary Sinise Ken Mattingly, original Apollo 13 command module pilot, bumped from mission.

STATE: We are going to watch “Apollo 13” to point out several leadership characteristics. Sit back, pay attention and enjoy the show.

During the following scenes, announce that there will be some specific discussion about them at the end. Note that the times are approximate and may vary.

Discussion Scenes:

1. First time in the simulator with Lovell, Haise and Mattingly (12:14 to 14:14)
2. Lovell's decision to remove Mattingly (23:10 to 26:40)
3. Second time in the simulator after Swigert replaces Mattingly (Part of time in #2)
4. The center engine cutoff immediately following the launch (38:00 to 39:30)
5. Swigert turning the command module around (41:50 to 44:25)
6. Everything around the line "Houston we have a problem" (51:00 to 55:45)
7. Shutting off fuel valve to Command Module and moving to LEM
8. Mattingly returning to flight control to describe the start up procedures

Pause 1

ASK: In the movie, Lovell mentions everyone has a part in putting a man on the moon—even the guy sweeping the floor. Why is that important?

-The need to have a sense of purpose, the basic "whys" to the job. Generally you will get more out of your people if there is time to explain the big picture.

-It's the leader's job to let the juniors understand the big picture.

ASK: During the flight simulator, what was the relationship between Lovell, Haise and Mattingly?

-GREAT relationship. During the crisis, they all acted a bit worried, but Haise and Lovell trusted Mattingly to get the job done. Could you see that trust in their body language? Yes. When they got out of the simulator it was obvious they were all impressed with Mattingly.

ASK: Why was there so much trust among the three members of Apollo 13?

-A lot of intense training and experience needed to build that trust. Like Honor in the CG Core Values, trust takes time to build.

ASK: When that simulation was over what did Mattingly want to do and how did he handle it?

-Wanted to do the simulation again to "get it right."

-Lovell and Haise did not; they had to catch early flights. Lovell, the mission commander made that clear to Mattingly.

-Without being insubordinate, Mattingly convinced the others to run the scenario again. Mattingly was respectful but insistent that they redo the drill. Mattingly used respect and facts to get his point across.

Pause 2

ASK: How would you have handled the dismissal of a vital crewmember?

-There is no right or wrong answer, generate a discussion about this issue.

Pause 3

ASK: Why were Haise and Lovell not confident with Swigert in the simulator?

-They had not worked well as a team. They did not have a chance to build any trust.

Pause 4

ASK: When the center engine quit shortly after take off how did the Apollo 13 crew and flight controllers handle it?

-They did a great job of communication from capsule to flight control

-Everyone on the ground did their jobs while maintaining a professional atmosphere. They followed established procedures and chain of command.

-Their success can be attributed to an all around well-trained team capable of handle "standard" emergencies.

Pause 5

ASK: When Swigert docks the Command Module with the Lunar Module, how do Lovell, Haise and the flight controllers act?

-Almost micro-manage, very uneasy. Why? He still had not demonstrated any skills up to that point.

Pause 6

ASK: Describe Gene Kranz during the onset of the major accident.

-Calm and focused; Got people working on short term goals to attack the problem.

-He kept them focused on solutions instead of complaining about circumstances.

-He did not assign blame but focused on getting answers from his flight controllers so he could make an informed decision.

Pause 7

ASK: What was the most important thing Kranz did when Lovell questioned the command about shutting off the valve to the O2 tanks?

-Kranz could have just said "do it;" however, he informed the astronauts that this appeared to be the only way to solve the problem. Providing them with the big picture—the "whys."

ASK: Lovell decides to power up the LEM to serve as a lifeboat before Flight Control made that recommendation. Where did Lovell get that idea?

-It came from being an expert in his field and devoted to his job. He used his training, knowledge, and experience to come up with a different option.

ASK: While Kranz was working with the flight controller to figure out what happened, he took several opinions before he made a decision. Why?

-Leaders are not always experts in every area but they do know and respect the opinions of the people who work for them. Kranz made decisions based on input from his experts throughout the film.

Pause 8

ASK: Describe Mattingly's devotion to duty.

-Very high. He worked harder than anyone to solve the power-up procedure despite being bumped from the mission.

ASK: When Swigert is in the command module with Lovell and Haise, what differences did you see?

-Swigert acted with more confidence.

-Both Haise and Lovell seemed more comfortable with him. The ordeal had built a trusting relationship.

ASK: Why did Lovell say the mission was a "successful failure?"

-The amount they learned about themselves, NASA and the Apollo systems gave them a wealth of knowledge.

-Despite overwhelming odds the final objective was met. GET THE CREW HOME.

Overall Points

Even during the crisis, communications to the capsule went through one person. This definitely kept the confusion to a minimum.

Both Lovell and Kranz never lost sight of the overall objective. GET HOME ALIVE. Throughout most of the movie, many people got caught up in little "tasks." The tasks are important but sometimes we lose sight of the final objective when we focus on the tasks. Both Lovell and Kranz time and again stated that the mission would not fail.